

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

July 11, 2017

The Honorable Rex W. Tillerson
Secretary
U.S. Department of State
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Tillerson,

We are alarmed by recent media reports that your Department chose to deny visas to six Afghan girls traveling to the United States for FIRST Global, an international robotics challenge to be held in Washington beginning July 16. We urge you to reconsider their visa applications - while security concerns should always be a primary consideration in visa issuance, it is hard to believe these young women present sufficient risk to prevent their temporary visit to the United States. This team of high school students has spent months developing a ball-sorting robot to present at this global challenge, and they braved a high-risk journey from their homes in Herat to attend visa interviews at the United States Embassy in Kabul earlier this year.

Barring these hardworking, creative young women from a competition premised on global connection and innovation runs counter to the State Department's mission of fostering security and stability through peace. The work of diplomacy is not limited to embassies and consulates; the United States engages with individuals abroad precisely because these individual relationships are the key to stability and development. Indeed, as the world's leader of scientific innovation and research, inviting the world's best and brightest to support our research efforts enhances our ability to expand knowledge in all fields, whether robotics or medicine, art or engineering, mathematics or history. In particular, supporting women's education initiatives has been a vital component of our diplomacy and has been proven to enhance stability and speed development more than almost any policy focus.

One of the most important accomplishments of our participation with NATO's effort to oust Taliban control of Afghanistan after the 9/11 attacks in 2001 was to end the Taliban's disenfranchisement of women and the ban on education of young girls. Those of us in Congress who have traveled to that country saw with our own eyes young girls going to school, which never would have been possible without the heroic sacrifice of our military. This order shutting the door on these young women, contradicts that hard fought change to create a fairer, more democratic society.

As our military leaders know and have said numerous times, vigorous diplomacy complements and strengthens our military efforts around the world - including our longstanding operations in Afghanistan. Save for a legitimate security threat, we urge you in the strongest terms to reverse this decision and welcome these young women to the United States.

Sincerely,



Joe Courtney
Member of Congress



Suzanne Bonamici
Member of Congress


Eliot L. Engel

Member of Congress


Ed Perlmutter

Member of Congress


Gwen S. Moore

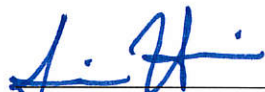
Member of Congress


Ro Khanna

Member of Congress


Mike Doyle

Member of Congress


Jim Himes

Member of Congress

  
Betty McCollum

Member of Congress

Seth Moulton
Member of Congress

Brendan F. Boyle
Member of Congress

 
Elizabeth H. Esty

Member of Congress

James P. McGovern
Member of Congress


Ted Lieu

Member of Congress

  
Dwight Evans

Member of Congress


David E. Price
Member of Congress

Bonnie Watson Coleman
Member of Congress

 
Jerrold Nadler

Member of Congress

Niki Tsongas
Member of Congress


Carolyn B. Maloney

Member of Congress

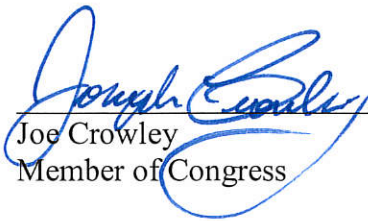
 
Bradley S. Schneider

Member of Congress

Sander Levin
Member of Congress


Madeleine Z. Bordallo

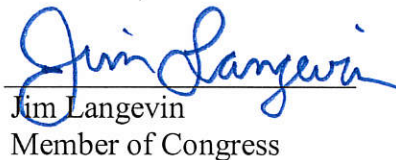
Member of Congress


Joe Crowley
Member of Congress



Scott Peters
Member of Congress


Ruben J. Kihuen
Member of Congress


John Yarmuth
Member of Congress


Jim Langevin
Member of Congress


Judy Chu
Member of Congress

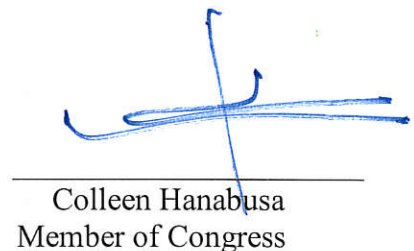

Sheila Jackson Lee
Member of Congress


Suzan K. DelBene
Member of Congress



Rick Larsen
Member of Congress

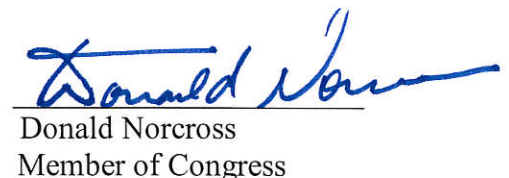

Barbara Lee
Member of Congress

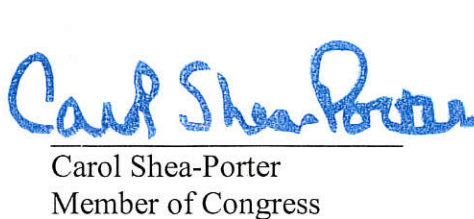

John B. Larson
Member of Congress

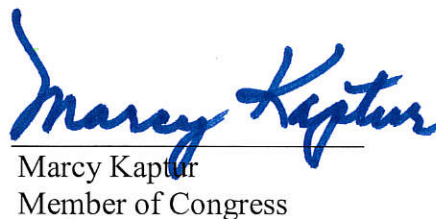

Colleen Hanabusa
Member of Congress


Nydia Velázquez
Member of Congress

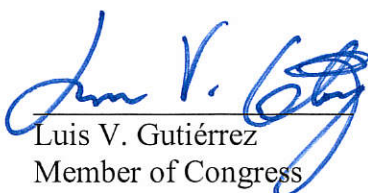

Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress

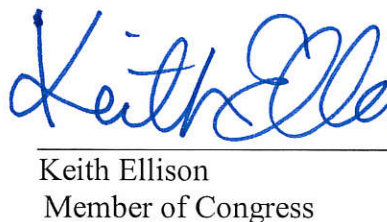

Donald Norcross
Member of Congress


Carol Shea-Porter
Member of Congress


Marcy Kaptur
Member of Congress

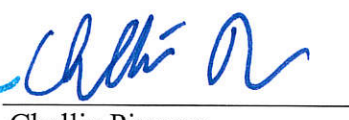

Rosa L. DeLauro
Member of Congress


Luis V. Gutiérrez
Member of Congress



Keith Ellison
Member of Congress

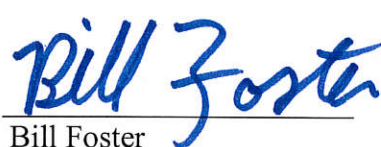

Alcee L. Hastings
Member of Congress

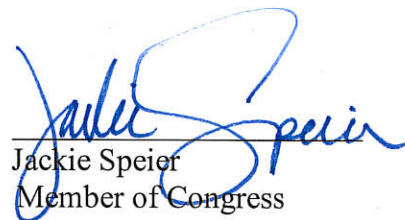

Brenda L. Lawrence
Member of Congress


Chellie Pingree
Member of Congress

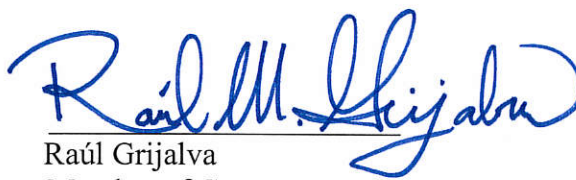

Dina Titus
Member of Congress


Val B. Demings
Member of Congress


Bill Foster
Member of Congress


Jackie Speier
Member of Congress


Bobby L. Rush
Member of Congress


Raúl Grijalva
Member of Congress

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Earl Blumenauer', with a horizontal line drawn underneath the signature.

Earl Blumenauer
Member of Congress